



PRESS RELEASE

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MAYOR BALLARD ISSUES URBAN GARDEN CHALLENGE ***GOAL IS TO CREATE 50 URBAN GARDENS IN CENTER TOWNSHIP BY END OF 2011***

INDIANAPOLIS – Announcing a goal of 50 urban gardens in Center Township by the end of 2011, Mayor Greg Ballard today at the Felege Hiywot Center garden in Martindale Brightwood issued his Urban Garden Challenge, joined by neighborhood residents, local health experts and urban gardeners.

“Urban gardens strengthen the fabric of our communities. They turn vacant land into a positive and active space, they grow healthy food for people to eat, they teach individuals of all ages new skills, and they help promote community involvement by actively engaging neighbors to work together toward a common purpose,” said Mayor Ballard. “Urban gardens encapsulate the Thanksgiving message of family, community, harvest and renewal. Creating more urban gardens and engaging more individuals and organizations in growing healthy food at the community and neighborhood level is a worthy pursuit for our city.”

Founded in the spring of 2004, the Felege Hiywot Center created its first 20-square-foot garden in the summer of 2006. Now, its urban garden encompasses a half acre.

“A need for healthy food sources and education about health and nutrition in Martindale Brightwood inspires us to make a change,” said Aster Bekele, executive director of the Center. “At the Center’s summer gardening camp and at the in-school and after-school gardening education classes, each youth participant develops gardening skills, an awareness of nature, a commitment to environmental preservation, an ability to make nutritious food choices and expertise in recycling and composting.”

Marion County Health Department Director Dr. Virginia Caine, a longtime advocate for Center Township residents, detailed the health and disease prevention benefits of a nutritious diet including fresh produce.

“The Marion County Health Department is very proud to support this initiative to help improve the health and wellness of the people of Indianapolis,” said Dr. Caine. “We recognize that poor nutrition is one of the greater challenges facing our urban populations, one that contributes to an array of diseases and conditions. Changing

that equation starts at the source: reversing the shortage of healthy food options. Much of our focus is on preventive measures, from vaccines to environmental issues and much more. We believe expanding urban gardens in the urban core will help contribute to our ongoing efforts to improve the health of the community.”

The Butler Center for Urban Ecology innovatively explores, stewards and enhances urban ecosystems. Its director, Tim Carter, Ph.D., specializes in landscape ecology with a focus on urban systems.

“Urban gardens and urban farms create opportunities to access local food in neighborhoods that did not previously offer such benefits,” said Dr. Carter. “Urban gardens can restore ecological health to the area. Improving biodiversity, giving access to local food and building a sense of community are all components of successful urban gardens and urban farms.”

Mayor Ballard today also announced the Urban Gardening Mentor Program, an effort that will teach and encourage urban gardening and growing food. This program, a partnership between the Office of Sustainability and Purdue Extension of Marion County, aims to assist individuals and organizations who are new to urban gardening.

“This partnership and the mentoring program are a key part of achieving the goal of having 50 urban gardens in Center Township by the end of next year,” said Mayor Ballard.

Mayor Ballard is committed to making Indianapolis the most sustainable city in the Midwest. Urban gardens play an important role in helping Indianapolis achieve that vision. In 2008, Mayor Ballard created the Office of Sustainability, and in June 2010 at the Indy Urban Farming Forum, Mayor Ballard announced the City’s first urban garden program. The collaborative partnership between the Department of Metropolitan Development, the Indy Land Bank and the Office of Sustainability allows community groups and individuals to use Land Bank properties for the purpose of growing healthy produce and creating urban gardens.

For more information about Mayor Ballard’s Urban Garden Challenge, visit www.sustainindy.org or email urbangardens@indy.gov.

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